

Lesson 3 — Genres, topics, controlling ideas

ZSL Heidelberg
Writing and Reviewing with AI
B2/C1 Academic English Skills

Writing with AI · SoSe 2026 · Paul Boldra
Monday 4 May 2026 · Room 204 · 16:15–17:45

§ 1 The five top-level genres

Academic writing

├─ **Essays**

| └─ Analytical

| └─ Argumentative

| └─ Reflective

| └─ Discursive

| └─ Visual analysis

├─ Case studies

├─ Literature reviews

├─ Reports

└─ Research proposals

§11 of the L02 handout covered the *essay* branch only. Case studies, literature reviews, reports and research proposals are siblings, not subtypes.

Genre	One-sentence summary
Essays	Develop an idea or argument in connected prose; subdivided into five subtypes (see §6).
Case studies	Examine one example in detail to draw lessons that apply more widely.
Literature reviews	Survey what has already been written on a topic and identify a gap.
Reports	Investigate something and present findings, often with recommendations.
Research proposals	Pitch work you intend to do, written before the work begins.

§ 2 Case studies *after Hean Read, Part II*

A focused look at one example — a person, a company, an event, a single decision — used to draw lessons that apply more widely.

Example. *How Lufthansa restructured after the 2020 grounding.* The point is not Lufthansa itself, but what its response teaches about how legacy carriers manage sudden capacity shocks.

Distinguishing move. The case is an instrument, not the topic. Writing that does not generalise from the one to the many is not a case study.

Common in: business, medicine, law, social work.

§ 3 Literature reviews *after Hean Read, Part II*

A survey of what others have already written on a topic, organised by theme or chronology, ending with a gap that future work might fill.

Example. *Twenty years of feminist epistemology — three positions and what they share.*

Distinguishing move. No new findings of your own. The writer maps the field: who said what, where they agree, where they disagree, what is missing.

Common in: every discipline. Often the first chapter of a thesis.

§ 4 Reports *after Hean Read, Part II*

A structured document presenting something investigated, written for someone who needs to decide or act.

Example. *Passenger flow at Madrid Barajas, T4 — measurements and recommendations.*

Distinguishing move. Headed sections — introduction, methodology, findings, recommendations. Specific data; no opinion in the body.

Common in: business, sciences, government, engineering.

§ 5 Research proposals *after Hean Read, Part II*

A pitch for work you want to do, written before the work begins. Includes what you will investigate, why it matters, how you will do it, and (sometimes) what it will cost.

Example. *A DFT study of basis-set sensitivity in transition-metal complexes — proposed methodology.*

Distinguishing move. Future tense throughout. Methodology preview. Significance — what the work will deliver to the field once done.

Common in: graduate school, grant applications, industry.

§ 6 Five essay subtypes — quick reference *Hean Read §11*

Subtype	Core move
Analytical	Break a topic into parts; explain each.
Argumentative	Take a position; defend it.
Reflective	First-person; describe what changed in you.
Discursive	Map several positions; do not pick one.
Visual analysis	Read an image, building, or design.

Full descriptions are in §11 of the L02 handout.

§ 7 Choosing a topic

You will spend weeks on a topic. Pick one that is:

- **Interesting** — to you. If not, you will write badly.
- **Investigable** — with sources you can actually reach.
- **Scoped** — not the whole field, not a single fact.
- **Genre-fit** — does what you want to say match the kind of writing?

A worked example: how John found his topic

John didn't set out to find a research topic — he stumbled across one. While auditing a seminar on nineteenth-century realism, he started reading the scholarly literature on the painter Thomas Eakins. As a keen birdwatcher, he quickly noticed something irritating: critics had repeatedly misidentified the marsh birds in a small series of Eakins' hunting scenes that had otherwise been ignored by art historians.

His first instinct was to correct the errors. But he soon realised that fixing mislabelled birds wasn't enough to carry a serious paper. So he kept pulling at the thread, and found a much stronger question underneath: why had Eakins painted these scenes at all? That question — not the birds — became his real topic.

A personal hobby had led him to a gap in the literature he would never have found by looking for one.

§ 8 Controlling ideas — thesis, enthymeme, hypothesis *after Lester, §2f*

A topic is a subject area (*progressive taxation, kinship, basis-set choice*). A controlling idea tells the reader what you will say about it.

Type	What it is	Example
Thesis	A position you will defend.	<i>Progressive taxation strengthens fairness in modern economies.</i>
Enthymeme	A thesis with a <i>because</i> -clause.	<i>Progressive taxation strengthens fairness, because it funds the services everyone depends on.</i>
Hypothesis	A testable, specific prediction.	<i>If income tax bands are flattened, public-service satisfaction will fall within five years.</i>

Lester's rule: a thesis without a *because*-clause is incomplete. The line between thesis and hypothesis is sometimes blurry — argumentative essays usually take a thesis or enthymeme; empirical research usually takes a hypothesis.

Lester's thesis checklist (p. 170)

Does your thesis:

1. Express your position in a full declarative statement — not a question, not a statement of purpose, not merely a topic?
2. Limit the subject to a narrow focus that grows out of research?
3. Establish an investigative, inventive edge — discovery, interpretation, or theoretical presentation?
4. Point forward to the conclusion?
5. Conform to the title and to the evidence you have gathered?

§ 9 Two meanings of "thesis" — English / German

In English, *thesis* means two different things. German keeps them separate.

English	German
thesis statement / claim	These, Leitthese, zentrale These
PhD thesis / dissertation	Dissertation, Doktorarbeit
Bachelor's / Master's thesis	Bachelorarbeit, Masterarbeit, Abschlussarbeit

When this lesson talks about a *thesis*, we mean the **first** kind — the claim you defend in your essay. The longer document is sometimes called a *thesis statement* in English to keep the two senses separate, but most writers just say *thesis* and trust context.

§ 10 Pitfalls of a thesis *after Hean Read, p. 60*

Three common problems.

1. Repeats the question or claim.

Question: Does progressive taxation strengthen fairness?

Weak thesis: Progressive taxation strengthens fairness.

The thesis adds nothing the question did not already contain.

2. Vague or too simple.

Weak thesis: Taxation is important.

True, but it commits the writer to nothing and points nowhere.

3. Too forceful or emotive.

Weak thesis: Anyone who opposes progressive taxation is selfish and wrong.

Emotion crowds out argument; the reader is asked to agree before any evidence is offered.

§ 11 Homework

1. **Pre-read for L04** — John's anecdote (above, §7).
2. **Monday 11 May, 16:15** — Assignment 1 (gap-fill) due.
3. **Monday 25 May, 16:15** — Assignment 2 (structure exercise) due. Full brief in §12.

GLOSSARY Key terms

Genre — kind of academic writing (essay, case study, ...).

Controlling idea — the sentence(s) that tell the reader what the writing will defend.

Enthymeme — a thesis with a *because*-clause.

Subtype — one of the five flavours of essay.

Thesis — a claim you will defend (and, in another sense, a long graduate research document — see §9).

Hypothesis — a testable, specific prediction.



Questions? zsl@boldra.com

§ 12 — Assignment 2: Structure exercise

Due Monday 25 May 2026, 16:15 · 600 words · 15 % of your final mark · ~~bring on paper to class or~~
email zsl@boldra.com

Imagine an academic paper in your field — your topic, your genre — and write its polished introduction and conclusion. Both belong to the same imagined paper. The introduction must contain a clear controlling idea (thesis, enthymeme, or hypothesis); the conclusion must answer it. Findings and sources may be invented, but pick one real citation style (APA, MLA, Chicago, Harvard, or Vancouver), use it correctly, and add a short note saying which style you chose and why. Marked out of 15: twelve points on the introduction, three on the conclusion.

§ 13 — Assignment 2: Full brief

Due Monday 25 May 2026, 16:15 · 600 words · 15 % of your final mark · ~~bring on paper to class or email zsl@boldra.com~~

§ 12.1 — Length

About **600 words in total**. A long introduction is normal in academic writing; a short conclusion is fine.

§ 12.2 — What you are writing

Imagine an academic paper of about 3,000–5,000 words in your field. You will **not** write the body. You will write **the polished introduction and conclusion** of that paper.

The introduction and the conclusion belong to the **same imagined paper**. The conclusion must close the argument that the introduction opens.

The content does **not** have to be factually correct. You may invent the findings, the examples and the sources to make the imagined paper plausible. What matters is that an intelligent reader, given only your introduction and your conclusion, can see the shape of the paper that sits between them — and feel that the writer has finished the job.

§ 12.3 — What your introduction must do

Your introduction must contain a **controlling idea** — a thesis, an enthymeme, or a hypothesis — placed where the reader can find it. (See §8 for the definitions and examples.)

Around that controlling idea, give the reader the topic, why it matters, what is already known, and what your imagined paper does that no one else has done.

§ 12.5 — Topic and genre

You choose both.

Use the topic you developed in the L03 controlling-ideas exercise, or pick a fresh topic from your field. The genre (essay, case study, literature review, report, research proposal, or one of the five essay subtypes from §11 of the L02 handout) is also yours to pick. Choose a genre that fits the kind of writing you actually do.

If you change your topic between now and the due date, that is fine. Your introduction and your conclusion just have to belong to the same paper at the moment of submission.

§ 12.6 — Citations

Citations matter even when the body is imaginary.

Pick **one** of the real citation styles from §3 of the L02 handout — APA, MLA, Chicago, Harvard, or Vancouver — and use it correctly throughout your introduction and conclusion.

You may **invent the sources**. A fabricated citation that follows APA style perfectly is fine for this exercise.

In a short separate note attached after your conclusion, tell me:

- which citation style you used, and
- why that style is the right choice for your field.

§ 12.4 — What your conclusion must do

Your conclusion must **answer the controlling idea** that the introduction proposed. It should refer back to it — by name, by restatement, or by a clear pointer — and close the argument.

If the introduction promises a question, the conclusion gives an answer. If it promises an investigation, the conclusion reports the verdict. If it promises a hypothesis, the conclusion tells us whether the imagined evidence supported it.

§ 12.7 — What to hand in

In a single document, in this order:

- 1. Your polished introduction and conclusion** (about 600 words).
- 2. A short note** naming your citation style and explaining why you chose it.

If you email it, name the file surname-A2.pdf or surname-A2.docx.

§ 12.8 — Marking

Section	Points
Introduction	12
Conclusion	3
Total	15

§ 12.9 — What's coming up that will help

- **L04 — Monday 11 May.** Macro structure, introductions and conclusions in detail. The CARS method. Lester's checklists. **You will get the tools you need to write this assignment in L04.**
- **L05 — Monday 18 May.** Revision with AI. A natural place to bring a draft for a second pass.
- After L04 you have just under two weeks to draft, revise and submit.

§ 12.10 — If you need more time

If you cannot submit on time, **email me before the due date.** The usual rules apply: sickness, exam clashes, and other good reasons can be excused. No reply and no submission means zero.